

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /055 W

-----240322Z 014889 /64

R 240118Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 473

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

CINCPAC HONOLULU

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PERTH

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CANBERRA 3674

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PGOV, AS

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN REFERENDUM VOTE

1. PRIME MINISTER FRASER AND HIS GOVERNMENT SCORED A PARTIAL VICTORY WHEN AUSTRALIAN VOTERS APPROVED THREE OF FOUR REFERENDA ON MAY 21. THE THREE REFERENDA, WHICH RECEIVED MAJORITY VOTES IN ALL SIX STATES, WERE:

A) STATE GOVERNMENTS WILL BE COMPELLED TO REPLACE A SENATOR WHO DIES OR RETIRES WITH AN INDIVIDUAL FROM THE SAME PARTY. (THIS CONVENTION WAS BREACHED IN 1975 BY THE NEW SOUTH WALES AND QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENTS WHICH LED TO THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT'S LOSING CONTROL OF THE SENATE AND ITS EVENTUAL FALL FROM POWER WHEN THE SENATE BLOCKED WHITLAM'S BUDGET.)

B) JUDGES APPOINTED IN FUTURE TO FEDERAL COURTS,
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INCLUDING THE HIGH COURT, WILL HAVE TO RETIRE AT 70.

C) VOTERS IN THE ACT AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
WILL BE ALLOWED TO VOTE IN FUTURE REFERENDA.

2. ALTHOUGH BETTER THAN 60 PERCENT OF VOTERS THOUGHT AUSTRALIA ALSO SUPPORTED THE DEFEATED REFERENDUM WHICH

CALLED FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS FOR THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE, THE PROPOSAL WAS REJECTED IN QUEENSLAND, WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND TASMANIA, THEREFORE FAILING BECAUSE EACH REFERENDUM MUST BE APPROVED IN AT LEAST FOUR STATES. POLITICALLY, THE FAILED REFERENDUM WAS MOST IMPORTANT TO FRASER BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE PERMITTED HIM TO POSTPONE HALF SENATE ELECTIONS UNTIL THE END OF 1978 RATHER THAN BE REQUIRED TO HOLD HALF SENATE ELECTIONS BEFORE JUNE 1978. FRASER WAS ANXIOUS TO AVOID ELECTIONS AS EARLY AS NEXT JUNE BECAUSE THE PARTY IN POWER TRADITIONALLY LOSES SEATS THEREIN; BECAUSE FRASER BELIEVES THE ECONOMY WILL PICK UP BEFORE THE END OF NEXT YEAR; AND BECAUSE HALF SENATE LOSSES COULD HAVE A SPILL-OVER EFFECT ON LIBERAL COUNTRY PARTY LOWER HOUSE ELECTION PROSPECTS. LOSING THE REFERENDUM WAS PARTICULARLY GALLING TO FRASER BECAUSE OPPOSITION TO IT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA WAS LED BY A LIBERAL PREMIER AND OPPOSITION IN QUEENSLAND BY A NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY PREMIER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFERENDUMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Subject: AUSTRALIAN REFERENDUM VOTE
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